

from:

Wendies  
Po Box 2335  
Louisville, Ky  
40201

EMPOWER

YR

SEXY

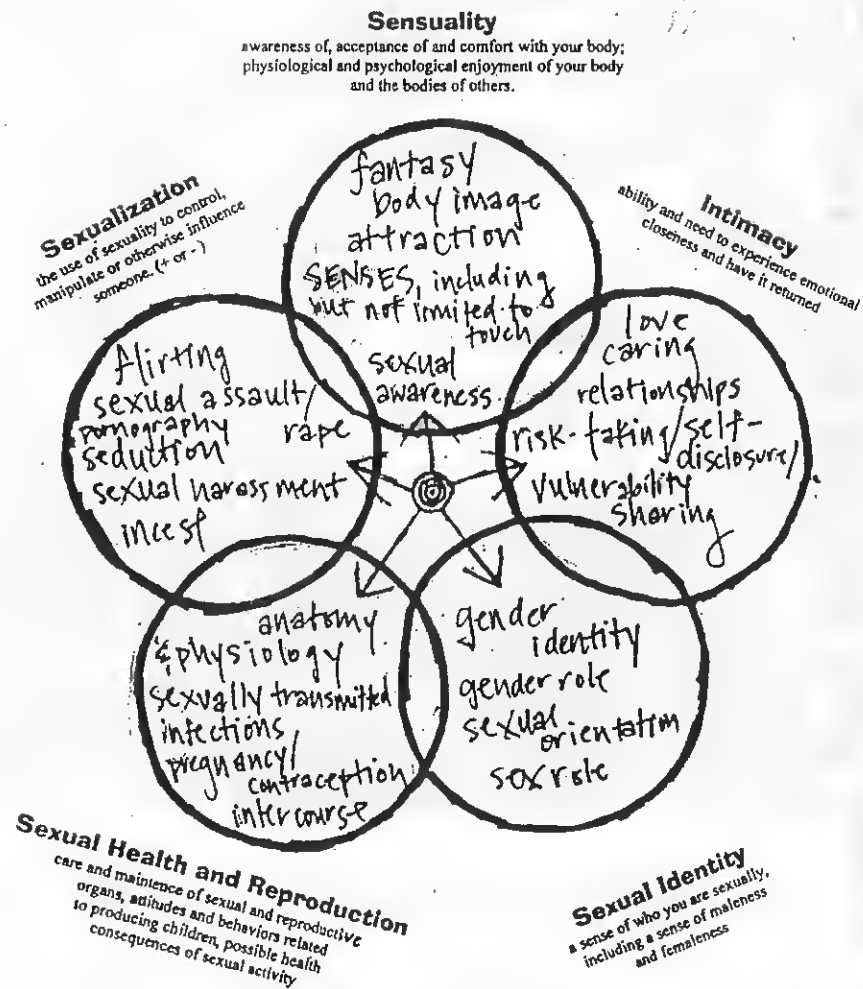
SELF

A WORKBOOK

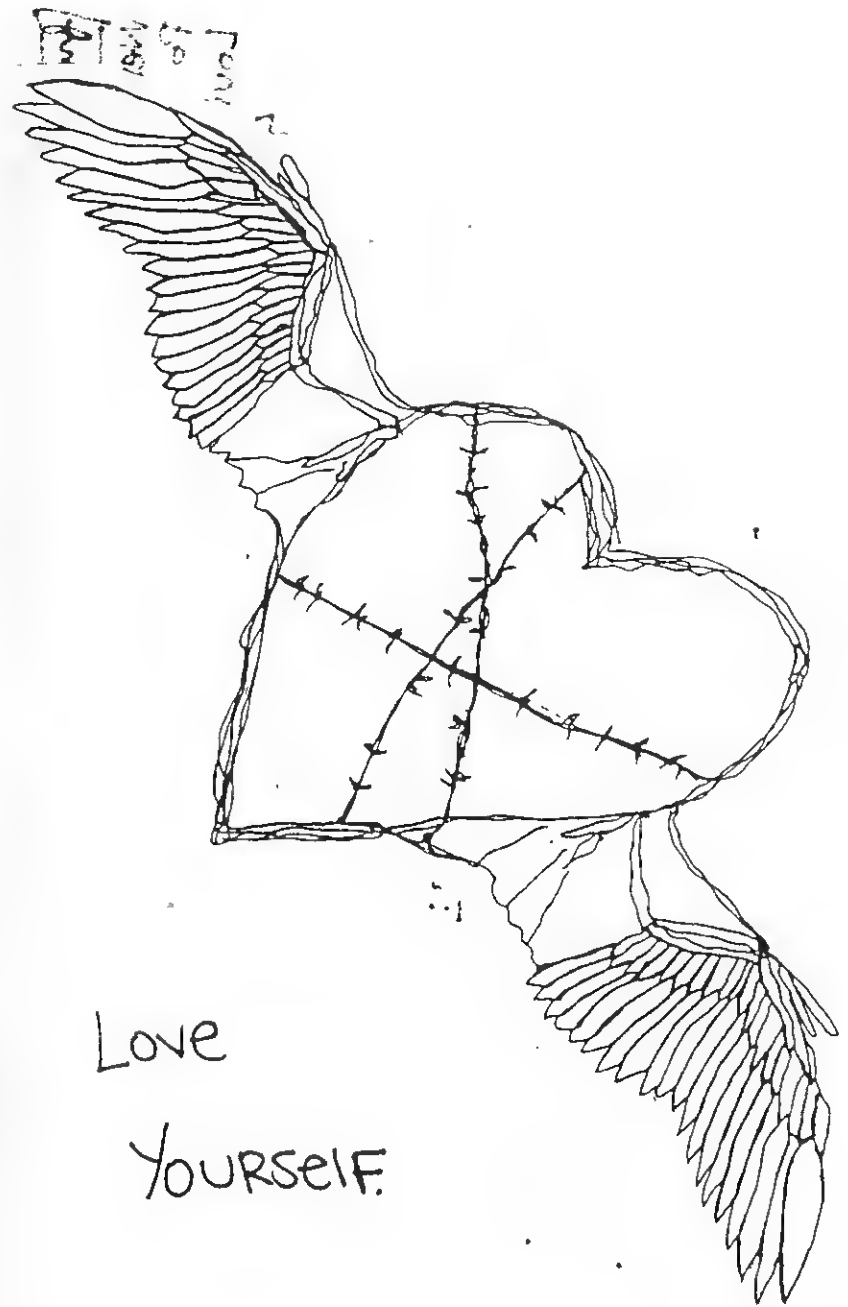
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# Circles of Sexuality



lovingly borrowed  
from Nekkid #1



## Websites

advocates for youth. org

pomegranate collective.org

phillyspissed.net

wenches.wordpress.com

Copy that distro. wordpress.com

## some introductions


### → what's empowerment?

feeling confident in yourself, your abilities, your intellect, and who you choose to be. claiming your life and its path, and not falling prey to mainstream judgments about yourself or others, and trusting your own instincts and thoughts. feeling confident in your ability to make good judgments. making your own decisions, and feeling good about it!

### → what's your sexuality?

it's how you perceive yourself in a sexual sense. sexuality includes a lot of different elements, which are mapped out for you below. the model that i've chosen to structure this zine splits sexuality into five categories that make it up. each aspect is like a chapter of the zine, the structure for this exploration. (please note: i know that some of them can go under other headings; don't let the grouping influence your responses to the questions. this is more about your exploration than my convenience/organizational style.)

this zine is anti-copyright. that means: make copies for your friends! it's meant to be written in, drawn on, exchanged, shared, etc. feel free to write and/or draw all over it (though you might need a composition notebook for all your reactions)! if you think someone else could use a copy, get in touch and we can work something out. if you have suggestions, feedback, etc-- let us know. this zine, like the subject matter, is a process.



send feedback to  
cheyenne neckmonster:  
neckmonster@gmail.com  
or  
the wench collective  
PO Box 2335  
Louisville KY 40201  
wenches@riseup.net

## 5 components of sexuality

this is best mapped out as a venn diagram, because there's a lot of overlap. this is based on a teaching tool developed by advocates for youth, a group out of washington, d.c. that does peer education and outreach about sexuality. these are in no particular order:

### Sensuality

awareness of, acceptance of and comfort with your body, psychological and physiological enjoyment of your body and the bodies of others. this includes self-awareness, the ability to be comfortable in your own skin, self-esteem, confidence, and a positive body image.

### Intimacy

ability and need to experience emotional closeness with another person and have it returned. intimacy is also explored in a sexual sense. emotional intimacy is something you have with a trusted friend or confidant-- someone you share secrets or personal information with. sexual intimacy is physical and/or emotional closeness with partners, but it doesn't require sexual intercourse (for example, you can be intimate in a sexual way by verbally sharing fantasies). caring about someone, loving/liking someone, taking risks, and being able to feel vulnerable with another person are part of intimacy.

### Sexual Identity

a sense of who you are sexually, including gender identity and how you express that, what sorts of sexual practices you're interested in, etc. this category can include tendencies towards certain kinds of sex or partners, being in touch with particular gender roles or expectations, and how you deal with those.

### Sexual Health & Reproduction

knowing how your parts work, including the care and maintenance of sexual and/or reproductive organs. attitudes and behaviors related to having or raising children, and the possible health consequences of sexual activity.

### Sexualization

the use of sexuality to influence someone (positively or negatively). this includes things like seduction, harassment, sexual abuse, and flirtation, and how those things affect us (as transmitters and receivers).



## Resources

are awesome!

### Zines/Independent Publications

- support \_\_\_\_\_ mistaken for straight \_\_\_\_\_
- girl/boy \_\_\_\_\_ unapologetic choice \_\_\_\_\_
- learning good consent \_\_\_\_\_ white blackbirds \_\_\_\_\_
- ask first! \_\_\_\_\_ hot pants \_\_\_\_\_
- how do you perform? \_\_\_\_\_ short and queer \_\_\_\_\_
- bound to struggle \_\_\_\_\_ striped stockings \_\_\_\_\_
- the gender galaxy \_\_\_\_\_
- how i learned to love myself, and occasionally other me \_\_\_\_\_

### Books

- the body image workbook: thomas cash
- gender outlaw: kate bornstein
- yes means yes!
- redefining our relationships: wendy o. motik
- sex for one: betty dodson
- our bodies, ourselves: the boston women's health collective
- sensuous magic - sex for beginners: pat colifia

## accountability is responsibility

when dealing with issues of sex and/or sexuality, there has been a trend towards accountability in terms of how people choose to behave in sexual situations. this seems like common sense, but assuming accountability for your actions is essential. you're responsible for everything that you do. your actions affect others (positively and/or negatively). you're not responsible for someone's reactions to your actions per se, but it's good to be aware that you can be held accountable if you do something that is traumatic or harmful to a partner. the best way to assume responsibility for your actions is from the beginning of an interaction to the end-- not after the fact.

being accountable includes being sure to get consent the whole way through an encounter with someone. asking if you can do stuff before you do it is really important! it can be sexy, it can be fun. you don't have to fill out a questionnaire before you make out and then keep checking it the whole time to see if you can do such-and-such a thing-- just ask. if the answer is no, it's no. if there's no answer to a question, assume that the answer is no, and don't take it personally. don't EVER assume it's okay to do something if you don't get consent!

being a responsible partner also includes being empowered to speak up about things you like or dislike when you're getting into a sexy situation with someone else. if a partner wants to do something you're not into, be sure to let them know! a common excuse for people who end up accused of crossing boundaries is "they never said it *wasn't* okay." we know this isn't a real excuse, but it's a commonly used one nonetheless, and it's designed to shame the other person. don't fall for it-- and, if possible, don't even let it get to that point.

part of being responsible is asserting yourself, and making sure you communicate your needs, desires, and boundaries. the other part is being receptive and respectful of others' needs, desires, and boundaries.

if someone does something inappropriate and hasn't asked you if it's okay, that constitutes a violation of your boundaries. this is an (unfortunately) common problem, and can have lasting effects on your life. rather than thinking of yourself as the victim of a crime, try to foster a self-image that isn't "damaged;" you're a survivor. there are lots of things you can do to get support. the resources page has a list of zines and books that can help. don't blame yourself if someone didn't ask you before they did something you didn't want to do--they need to know they did something inappropriate.

## a note on defining words that mean something different to everyone

In the book Human Sexuality in a World of Diversity, human sexuality is defined as "how people experience the erotic and express themselves as sexual beings." Having a sexual sense of yourself is natural to everyone, including those who choose not to engage in sexual activities with others. If you choose to be celibate, or consider yourself nonsexual, that is still your sexual identity and sexuality, and you should own it. Sexuality is about a LOT more than just "sex," as we demonstrated above. Remember that what sexuality means to you is probably different than what it means to your best friends, parents, and other people in your life. That's one reason why it's hard to discuss and create space to talk about it. That's part of why this zine exists-- to give you space to think about your sexuality and what it means to you, so you can share it with others, should you choose to.

This is a sex-positive zine, meaning that it encourages sexual expression and exploration. Be safe, get consent, and educate yourself!

→ Let's Get Started. ←

## inventory

even if you can't articulate what your sexuality is, you can probably map out a good idea of what it is not. use these questions to get a better idea.

what are some ways that you have rejected your sexuality? (this can include things you're uncomfortable about, ways that you feel like you hide your sexuality from others, or ways you feel judged or rejected by others/society, overtly or not.)

what are some ways that you have embraced your sexuality? (this can include things you are comfortable with, ways that you feel like you positively express your sexuality to others or yourself, or ways you feel that others have empowered you or made you feel good about your sexuality.)

## exploration

can you define your own sexuality? for many, it is in a state of change, until an identity is settled on-- or being in flux is an okay way to be too. if nothing else, you can look at the statements on this list that i've made up. maybe draw a star next to things that resonate with you. if you don't identify with something, think about why you don't, and whether that has to do with other things on the list. this can be a good way to figure out where you are.

i like hugging/cuddling.  
i am comfortable with how i look.  
my body is mine; i have the final say on what i do with it.  
i have friends who support my decisions.  
my political leanings affect my attitude(s) toward my body and sexuality.  
my religious beliefs affect my attitude(s) toward my body and sexuality.  
my culture affects my attitude(s) toward my body and sexuality.  
my personal history affects my sexuality and/or attitudes towards my body.  
mainstream culture tells me what my sexuality should look like.  
the media (magazines, billboards, tv/movies) sends me messages about my sexuality.  
my parents have talked to me about sex and sexuality.  
my parents have talked to me about the sexualities of others.  
my peers/friends send me messages about my sexuality.  
my peers/friends send me messages about the sexualities of others.  
i dress a certain way to express who i am.  
i have strong beliefs about sexual practices.  
i want to know more about how my body works.  
i like talking about my sexuality.

do any of the above statements apply to you? do you feel limited by any of them? why? what would it look like to not have those forces acting on you as a sexual being?

## Sexualization

### harassment

Harassment can take many forms. It can be a sleazy person being too forward in a bar. It can be someone yelling at you on the street from their car. It can be someone you know making you uncomfortable with comments they're making about you. Nobody deserves harassment, but a lot of us get it from time to time. Have you ever been sexually harassed in a workplace, school, in public, or at home?

How do you deal with harassment, if you receive it?

Have you ever harassed someone on the street (cat-calling, name-calling, etc)?

Why?

Remember: what may seem to you as a compliment may be taken as an inappropriate comment. Be careful.

### flirtation

Go somewhere that a lot of people go to, regardless of age, race, gender, etc (ie, a grocery store, bus stop, the airport). Imagine flirting with someone you don't know.

What does this look like?

Is it fun?

What are your intentions?

Do you think the other person will be receptive to your advances?

Do you think you may be viewed as a threat? Why/why not?

What are the potential positives/negatives?

How do you flirt with someone without making them feel objectified?

### pornography

-have you watched or looked at pornography/erotica?

-have you watched it with friends? lovers?

-where does your porn come from? is it independently published/distributed?

-does it influence your ideas about sex? how?

-did it give you any assumptions about sexuality/bodies?

-have you ever discussed these assumptions with others?

## birth control

Some people have strong opinions about the topic of birth control; which form is best, whether or not particular forms have long-term health effects, whether or not all forms are ethical (environmentally, personally; some contain animal products, hormones from birth control pills have had disastrous effects on fish populations from human waste in their environment), etc. Being in touch with how you feel about forms of birth control (which can also facilitate safer sex, depending on your partner) are important.

If pregnancy/parenting isn't an option for you (and you're capable of being pregnant, or of becoming a parent), it's essential to discuss birth control options (and potentially what to do if an unwanted/unplanned pregnancy occurs). Barrier methods, hormonal methods, parenting, adoption, abortion, and emergency contraception are all options that currently exist as ways to deal with pregnancy (or the risk thereof)—know how you feel about these things, know your body, and know how your partner feels about it.

## FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES!

we all have ideas or attitudes about ourselves that probably could use some work. this isn't a negative thing-- change is good-- and recognizing that change is possible is really important. it's easy to get stuck in feedback loops with yourself and your ideas about what kind of person you are. it doesn't matter what you look like, what kind of beliefs you have, or how much money you make a year; the important thing is to remember that you're an individual capable of the same emotional connections as everyone else.

by making lists of the aspects that you think are good, and those that need work, you're taking a step to making those things better, or at least being more mindful of the things that you see as shortcomings or bad habits. if you think it will help, write notes around the house (next to a mirror, in the kitchen, places you go everyday) as reminders about the things that you like about yourself (and reasons why!).

Things I Like About Myself:

Things I Want To Work On:

♡ ♡ the most important relationship ♡ ♡

This probably sounds cheesy, but the most important relationship you'll ever have is with yourself. Working out the issues brought up in this zine, and in your life in general, will be a great help to getting more in touch with who you are, what you want, and how you can make that happen for yourself.

Your relationship with yourself encompasses all the elements that a relationship would with someone else; it is often overlooked that the sexual relationship with oneself is essential to an understanding of what kind of person you are sexually, and what you enjoy. Never discount the relationship you have with yourself—you know yourself the best; stay in touch.

There's a really unrealistic and unfair expectation put on us by society that we have to have a partner to be sexually fulfilled, and that's not true. Partners can be interesting, add some new elements to the mix, but honestly to be a healthy (sexual) human being, you just need to treat yourself well!

# Sensuality

## questions about boundaries

- what are your physical boundaries? think about where your boundaries are in relation to how close you are to someone. if you're in an empty bus, and someone you don't know comes and sits right next to you, does it seem "weird" or make you uncomfortable? if it's a friend, do you have the same reaction?
- how do these boundaries reflect social norms?
- if someone you don't know walks next to you on the sidewalk, does this make you uncomfortable? do you speed or slow your pace so that you're no longer next to each other?
- who do you allow to kiss you? a friend? a partner? do these differ? what makes them different?
- what level of knowing someone makes you comfortable to change your boundaries with them? is it based on trust, attraction, or other factors?
- how did you come to know where your boundaries are/were? have they been crossed? have they changed? how?
- do you have psychological boundaries? these can be situations you don't want to get into because you feel anxious thinking about them, or maybe topics of discussion that you don't like to have brought up. what are they? why do they make you uncomfortable?
- psychological boundaries also vary with who is testing them. if a friend asks you a personal question, do you answer? if some random person asks you the same question, do you answer?
- are there questions you don't want to ask yourself, or are afraid of being asked? why?
- sometimes when a psychological boundary is run into, it's called a trigger-- a thing that makes you uncomfortable, or reminds you of a traumatic or unpleasant experience. do certain smells, discussion topics, songs, or other things make you uncomfortable? what do you do when faced with them? (this is pretty normal-- don't let these rule you! there are lots of things you can do to ground yourself when you're triggered. see "support zine" for a lot of really helpful suggestions, if you don't already have ways of dealing with being triggered.)
- are there things that you would prefer to feel more comfortable about (for instance, talking about using protection)? what would it look like to be comfortable with that?
- have you considered listing your boundaries? are there items on this list that you would like to work on? how do you think you could work on those?

# Sexual Health

## self-care

- What kinds of things do you do in order to maintain your sexual health?
- Do you know how to do a self-exam?
- How much do you know about birth control?
- What about STI's and how to prevent contracting them/deal with having them?
- What kinds of measures have you taken to ensure your safety in intimate situations?

## hormonal cycles

Hormonal shifts mark a lot of major changes in our physical appearance and bodily functions over the course of our lives. Production of certain hormones causes the onset of puberty, menstruation and menopause in some folks, and growth of more body hair, among other things. Hormonal cycles can affect when someone will start menstruating or what kind of emotions will dominate the next few hours. This affects everyone, though-- the stereotype of women being "hormonal" and emotional is false-- every person experiences hormonal shifts that affect their moods, appetites, etc.

All people, regardless of their testosterone or estrogen levels, experience hormonal shifts; for folks with more estrogen, it's common to have a monthly cycle of emotional and physical changes that the body goes through (some menstruate as part of this process). For folks with more testosterone, there have been recorded daily, monthly, and seasonal testosterone cycles--hormones don't just affect people with more estrogen in their bodies.

## statuses

- Do you talk to partners openly about STI status?
- Why is it important to talk about this?
- Sometimes it may seem awkward to bring up your own status or ask about someone else's. What are some ways we can change the stigma around talking about sexually transmitted infections/diseases?
- Do you have preferred ways of using protection? What are they?
- What activities are "safe" to do without protection? Why?
- How often do you get tested? Does this correlate with other medical exams or sexual encounters?



## what you do

sexual practice can be involved in orientation, too. some people identify as "tops" or "bottoms" (language taken from gay mens' culture). this language also crosses over into bdsm culture (bondage/domination & submission/sadism & masochism) to refer to the person who is "doing," and the person who is "being done to." it's important to remember that bdsm practice is guided by principles of consent, safety and being risk-aware when engaging in potentially risky activities. it is not to be confused with non-consensual intimate partner violence, which is characterized by one partner taking over another's life and often maintaining this control with threats, violence, and other means that are designed to terrorize the other partner.

## third genders

There are a lot of cultures around the world that have more than two widely accepted gender identities, and these are often linked closely to spirituality. A commonly cited example is the two-spirit, a Native American gender group that is usually a person who is biologically opposite of the cultural role they fulfill-- such as men who are more domestic/feminine and women who are more involved in public/masculine life. Two-spirits were often shamans as well, spiritual community leaders.

In India, there are people known as hijras, who are known as "neither man nor woman." They exist outside of the gender binary, and for that reason, they are considered to have special ritual knowledge and powers. Usually, they live in large family groupings or intentional communities that provide them with a place to live and others who all contribute to the group's well-being. Hijras often dress and refer to themselves semantically as feminine, but do not generally attempt to "pass" as women; they are comfortable with their alternative status.

Third/alternative genders exist in many cultures around the world. Why do you think ours is different? Do you consider some groups alternate genders that aren't called such? Which groups or individuals come to mind?

## gettin' hitched

The relationship ideal in our society is marriage. However, it's not legal for all people who are in relationships to have their unions recognized by their local governments. There are a few states that now permit legal homosexual unions, and some states and businesses allow for "domestic partnerships," where non-married but committed couples may share insurance benefits and such. Beyond that, there is no legal recognition for other forms of partnership. What cultural norms do these laws reflect? Why do you think this is the case?

## experience sensation

get your imagination working! think about an assortment of materials: silk, canvas, fake fur, plastic wrap, tissue paper, cotton cloth, wool, etc. now, think about what they would feel dragged across your forearm, or your shoulders, or along your sides. part of sensuality is appreciating the variety of sensations your body is capable of feeling. if any of these sounds enticing, why are you still reading? try it!

## build confidence in your own skin

\*if you don't feel comfortable doing this, don't force yourself. pushing your own boundaries and coming out of your 'comfort zone' can be really healthy though. know what's good for you-- if you're not in a good place or don't think you can do this activity and see yourself in a positive light, maybe you should wait until you feel more comfortable. \*

1. stand in front of a mirror naked for five minutes. (if being naked makes you really uncomfortable, stand in front of a mirror in your underwear or a swimsuit.) one fun way to time it: pick a song or two that you like and listen to it while doing this exercise!
2. during this five minutes, try to focus on the positive things about your body. remind yourself that you're beautiful and worthy of love; everyone is. don't compare yourself to anyone else: we're all different-- that's part of what makes each of us so awesome.
3. if you need more or less time, that's okay. the only person involved is you, and it's not an endurance test.
4. write down how you feel when you're done.
5. this exercise works best when done repeatedly over time. there's no set schedule, just whenever you feel like it is a good idea, or when you feel comfortable doing it, or every wednesday at 5pm-- whatever works for you!

feeling good about your body is a really important step towards integrating a positive body image into your sense of self, and your sexuality. getting used to showing your body to yourself will boost your self-confidence whether you're clothed or not! the only standard you can hold yourself to is you. also, remember that your outsides are, in part, just a container for your insides. do you feel physically healthy? that's really important, too!

## visualization

picture yourself in revealing clothing. this can range from a tight-fitting shirt to a thong-- whatever you consider to be "revealing." how do you feel? (check all that apply.)

☐ cute   ☐ dirty   ☐ giggly   ☐ embarrassed   ☐ turned on  
☐ ashamed   ☐ empowered   ☐ disempowered   ☐ sexy   ☐ uncomfortable  
☐ fabulous   ☐ attractive   ☐ objectified   or others: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

what do you think about your reaction?  
are you surprised about how you feel?

do you think there's a particular way you 'should' feel? why?  
if you can't guess how you would react, try it! playing dress-up (or dress-down)  
can be a lot of fun.

this exercise can also be a good starting point to check in with yourself about your self-image, and where it intersects with your sexuality. this will likely change over time, due to various factors in your life. change is good.

## eight common "body image distortions," according to a useful book

In The Body Image Workbook, Thomas Cash describes a lot of "body image distortions," which are how he describes the thinking of people who have hang-ups about the way they look. The workbook is full of questions and things to think about. There are eight distortions, paraphrased below. Some may remind you of a way you think about yourself negatively. Think about ways you can change these, or check the book out from a library.

The distinctions between "sex" and "gender" are meaningless when put into the context of many individuals' gender identities. Some identify as gender fluid, which means oscillating between different gender identities, or taking on masculine, feminine, or other characteristics based on their circumstances or preference at the time. There has been an attempt to visualize gender as a spectrum, with "completely male" at one end and "completely female" on the other, and everyone else lumped in between somewhere. However, this doesn't allow movement along the spectrum, and certainly doesn't allow for third genders or folks whose gender identity is undefined, or an exaggeration of "completely male" or "completely female." It still traps everyone within the male/female binary.

A zine came out called "The Gender Galaxy" that proposes a new visualization of gender: each gender is a "star," or a point in space in the gender galaxy. These points are not necessarily fixed, and everyone has a space to move around in, to choose their location, etc. This breaks the range of genders into the third dimension, and doesn't apply importance to any one point on the "chart" as more valid than another. There are no benchmarks of "completely female" and "completely male." This nullifies the emphasis on biological sex as a determining factor in one's gender identity-- and introduces the notion that sex and gender are on the same plane--self-defined, and changeable.

## how many?

there are also terms to describe how many partners you may have. "monogamy" is the most common cultural image of a relationship-- a closed relationship involving two people. "polyamory" or "polyfidelity" or "nonmonogamy" are all ways to describe open relationships that involve more than two people. monogamy and non-monogamy are both commitments. monogamous relationships often require work to maintain both partners' interest in each other, and to keep the relationship afloat. non-monogamous relationships require constant communication from everyone involved with each other. non-monogamy is not the same as cheating, because when one "cheats" they hide their partners from each other. in an open relationship, everyone is aware of other partners that their partners may have.

relationship with yourself—which is, after all, the longest and most important relationship you'll ever have.

what if you're generally into men, but you sometimes like women? even within the three choices above, does "bisexual" define that? "bisexual" is usually considered an in-between phase for people, or an exploratory identity that doesn't stick—though this is rather unfair to those who identify as such for their entire lives!

there is a wide variety of other orientations, ranging from "pansexual" (being open to love anyone, regardless of gender identity) to "beteroflexible" (primarily heterosexual with exceptions), to "queer" (usually meaning that the individual chooses to define their orientation for themselves-- this term's ambiguity is part of its appeal), and beyond—just to name a few.

a lot of sexual orientations are disparaged by mainstream society. one of the main reasons why this happens is because most non-beterosexual partnerships don't usually involve marriage or children. the fairy-tale of romance and relationships in our culture is "boy meets girl, they get married and have kids, and live happily ever after."

if a relationship doesn't match this story, it's not considered to be of the same quality; somehow inferior or a threat to the heterosexual monogamy standard, though viewing something so personal as sexual orientation as in opposition to another orientation creates an unrealistic adversarial/oppositional idea. working towards cooperative acceptance of all orientations is important for culture to move forward.

### on the difference between "gender" and "sex"

Put simply, "sex" is defined as one's biology, and "gender" is defined by the individual-- these may not correlate with mainstream society's ideas about how sex and gender connect. Gender roles (the masculine/feminine binary) are prescribed by our culture on the basis of "biological sex": those people with male reproductive organs are defined by doctors as "men," those with female reproductive organs are defined by doctors as "women," and those born with some combination (intersexed individuals) are often given surgery as newborns to designate them with a gender, and are often raised as either male or female, depending on the outcome of surgery. Our culture is pretty hung up on this dichotomy; those who wish to identify otherwise have to create their own space.

1. Dichotomous thinking: either/or. "Either I'm beautiful or I'm ugly." This kind of thinking doesn't allow space for the shades of gray between black and white.
2. Comparing yourself to unrealistic or extreme standards. Having unrealistic ideals causes individuals to fixate on inadequacies within themselves, or making assumptions that everyone else is "making them look bad" by not having the same flaws.
3. Selective attention. Focusing on an aspect of one's appearance and exaggerating it-- getting stuck on one imperfection and minimizing all the positive qualities about oneself.
4. Blaming. Jumping to conclusions about how a disliked attribute caused a disappointment or difficulty in life. Scapegoating one's appearance for problems creates a mode of thinking that one's body creates their social experience for them.
5. Projection. "If I think I look bad, others must think so too." Projecting a personal opinion of oneself onto others, often with negative consequences.
6. Assumptions about the future. This mode of thinking convinces oneself "Until I look perfect, I won't be happy." Life and people are unpredictable-- one can't rely on their hairstyle or waist size to determine their life's path.
7. Self-imposed restrictions. "I can't do \_\_\_ because of my looks." Negative messages intended to restrict activities. This isn't a reflection of someone's actual capacity to do something, it's a choice to limit oneself based on insecurities.
8. Emotional reasoning. "Because I feel unattractive, I must be unattractive." Emotional inner dialogue that confuses feelings with facts. This mode of thinking can (dangerously) reinforce itself by creating imperfections to feel bad about.

The way that Cash describes to fix these distortions is to do some "corrective thinking." This involves confronting the assumptions you have about your body and thinking positively about yourself. Rationally debunking the assumptions that you have about your appearance is the key to overcoming a lot of the body

image distortions. I highly recommend this book to anyone who identifies strongly with any of the above.

# Intimacy

## communication

list or journal about things that you wish you talked about more (with friends, family, acquaintances, with yourself). these can relate to your sexuality, personality, confidence, self-acceptance journey, emotions, etc. use this list as prompts for journal entries, art pieces, or whatever you choose. become more comfortable with the ideas on the list. work up to communicating about them.

a good place to start: what are ways you can make spaces for talking about these issues? maybe you should have a coffee date with a friend once or twice a month and talk about sexuality and your experiences. it's really useful to verbalize your experiences and pick out patterns from your life. this is also a really useful skill when handling situations with partners. if you've talked about a subject with a trusted friend, it can be easier to verbalize those things with a partner.

## let's define consent.

consent is, at its core, permission from someone else for you to do something.

this can be getting permission to bring up a topic of discussion, or to give a hug, or to use their car. consent is also key to having supportive & open communication within relationships. consent is a big part of empowering ourselves and others-- if both parties know what's going to happen, and they're okay with it, consent has been reached and activities can go from there.

there are, of course, limits to this model. this is important to remember. just because someone says something might be okay, they have the right to change their minds if something turns out to not be what they thought it was, or makes them uncomfortable. giving consent isn't a binding contract, it's an informal agreement, especially if it's an exploratory experience.

what does consent mean to you?

do you think it's important in certain situations more than others?

how would you like someone else to get your consent before borrowing something of yours? before visiting your house? before touching you?

how do you get consent during sex? is asking "unsexy"? why? how can we change that?

do you think it's okay to do anything without getting consent first? what/wby?

## where do you fit?

here's a list of generic masculine and feminine attributes/characteristics, as defined by mainstream culture. put a check next to an item if it applies to you, leave it blank if it doesn't, and maybe circle it if you haven't thought about it or you're not sure. don't feel bad if you don't "match up" completely with your preferred/socially imposed gender identity-- that is why they're called stereotypes, after all. in fact, expect to have some of each; these traits only represent part of the full picture, not the entire spectrum of options. see how limiting a binary can be?

### feminine traits:

high voice  
long hair  
maintains body hair  
absent/fine facial hair  
not physically strong  
accommodating  
enjoys cooking  
interested in having kids  
mechanically inept  
concerned with physical appearance  
wears makeup  
nurturing  
maternal  
prefers romantic comedies  
emotional  
passive  
indecisive/influenced  
financially dependent  
polite

### masculine traits:

deep voice  
short hair  
less maintenance of body hair  
prominent facial hair  
physically capable/strong  
competitive  
enjoys sports  
doesn't show weakness  
drinks alcohol  
mechanically adept  
verbally assertive  
prefers action movies  
suppresses emotions  
independent  
aggressive  
decisive  
breadwinner  
wears pants  
wears suits

## who you are & who you like

sexual orientation is the term that is often used to sum up "who you are and who you like." the three most common orientations are heterosexual, homosexual (gay or lesbian), or bisexual. however, these designations are based on your status as a male or female. this is pretty problematic, due to the folks who don't fit into the "male" or "female" categories-- and also the limiting nature of the orientations themselves. it's also limiting if you only consider yourself in a

## questioning gender

- how do you define gender?
- do you identify with a given gender, or do you choose to identify with a different gender? would you like to make up your own?
- androgyny is defined as "being of indeterminate sex," or having a mixture of female and male characteristics. does this apply to your appearance? your relation to others? your voice, character, mannerisms?
- do you have a pronoun preference? a lot of people go by "be" or "sbe," but there are alternatives like "they," "zie," and "hir," to name a few fairly common ones. do you think that a choice between two genders is limiting?
- what influences your gender identity? media? peers? culture? religion?
- have you considered what it would be like to be another gender?
- why are there only two "default" genders when there are more than two sexes? speaking in purely medical\* terms, there are "male," "female," and "intersexed" individuals recognized by the medical industry. why don't we have (at least) a third gender, or let intersexed folks choose their gender once they're old enough to, rather than assigning them a gender at birth?
- why do we have gender, anyway?

\*the medical/scientific community has long been known for arbitrarily naming genders of intersexed individuals by performing genital assignment surgeries on newborns (sometimes without parents' knowledge or consent, rather than waiting and asking the child as they are able to make informed consent on the matter).

## cues

In the book Gender Outlaw, Kate Bornstein mentions that a study was done which found that it would take approximately four female "gender cues" to outweigh one male cue; one is assumed male until proven otherwise in our culture. This is why a lot of women get "sirred" and few men are addressed as "ma'am." Cues can include:

- physical attributes (one's body shape, stature, hair, clothes, voice, movement),
- behavioral (manners, protocol, how you act),
- textual (history, name, relationships),
- mythic (archetypes: ie, "the weaker sex," "strong, silent types"),
- power dynamic (assertiveness, persistence, aggression),
- sexual orientation (everyone is assumed heterosexual until proven otherwise-- if a feminine-looking male is with another male, he is more likely to be assumed female). and
- biological (one's assigned gender, chromosomes, hormones).

What gender cues do you think you respond to the most? How do you identify someone's gender, especially if you're uncertain? (\*hint: it never hurts to ask politely if someone has a pronoun preference, and it is generally appreciated by the answerer.)

## checklists for clearer communication

with a friend, partner, or on your own, complete a checklist of all the sexual activities you can think of. check them off as "yes" (i would do this), "no" (i would not do this), and "maybe" (not now, i've never thought of it, i'm not sure what it is). you can find these online or you can make up your own.

some activities you could list might include, but aren't limited to: making out, massage, tickling, masturbation (alone or with a partner), sex using toys or fingers, genital sex, oral sex, sharing fantasies, sensation play (ie, experiencing different textures or temperatures), "talking dirty," role-playing, etc.

## what am i?

are there parts of yourself that you find mysterious? do you know how your body works? how someone else's works? list things that you aren't sure about (menstrual periods, hormonal changes, sleep patterns, the effects of caffeine, etc). give yourself a homework assignment and go to the library.

getting familiar with anatomy and health is one of the most important things we can do in order to understand how our bodies work. self-exams are pretty easy to do (and there are resources all over the internet for all kinds of bodies!). for guides about how to do this, check in with one of the health collectives listed at the end of this zine, or maybe ask at a clinic in your town.

## safe spaces

- How can we create safe spaces in our lives?
- What does it mean to be in a safe space?
- Where do you feel safest? Why?
- What are some ways you can make sure that the spaces you inhabit are safe for others?
- What types of things do you do to make a space feel more inclusive? What do others do? Why are these important?
- What do you need in order to feel safe? A non-judgmental environment? Time alone? A friend/ally?

## chart your life

here's an example of a diary page that charts various things and their effects on you. you can copy this page and lay it out into a zine-type thing for your own personal use. this way, you can keep track of what you're putting into your body, and what you're getting out of it!

Date:

What I ate today:

What I drank:

Medicines, drugs, etc:

How I felt when I woke up:

How I feel now:

Goals for today:

What I accomplished:

Hours of sleep last night:

What I look forward to tomorrow:

How I can make it happen:

other notes, thoughts, etc:

## Sexual Identity

### a dichotomy

why is it that a lot of sexual norms are defined based on one's gender presentation? humans really like to categorize things, and this has manifested itself in the deep-rooted expectations of sexuality that our culture has laid out for us. unfortunately, a lot of us don't fit in the (somewhat narrow) roles that we're expected to choose from.

if someone has sex with multiple partners, they're often referred to as a slut (especially if they're female); or are considered a prude if they don't—but there's no healthy middle ground, or a socially acceptable means of exploring sexuality, especially before reaching adulthood. it's a pretty unfair double-standard, especially when considering the cultural notion that a male who "gets all the girls" is a successful or popular individual, and a male who has no sexual partners is considered unsuccessful.

part of this emphasis comes from religious influences on modern society, and other bits come from heteronormativity: the prevailing cultural notion that to be heterosexual (and to desire a monogamous marriage as the ultimate goal in love) is "natural" or "normal." this notion is reinforced in nearly every disney film ever made, most romantic comedies, and most advertisements (especially in magazines aimed at teenage audiences).

### gender expectations

gender expectations are cultural ideas that we, as members of current society, are expected to adhere to. these can work in two ways: ways in which we perpetuate them (by acting within those limitations) and by reinforcing them (by urging others to act within those limitations). consider the following:

- why are boys made fun of/beaten up/belittled when they cry?
- do you think girls are considered promiscuous when they dress a certain way?
- does our culture allow for women who are outspoken, or men who are emotional? is this mostly applicable in specific situations? why do you think this is so?
- do you agree with society's gendered standards for behavior?
- would you rather have different ones? how would you like to change gender expectations?